

Policy for Funding Extensions and Adaptations to the Homes of Local Authority Foster Carers and Adopters.

1. Purpose of Policy

1.1 This policy sets out the criteria adopted by the Local Authority to provide funding to Local Authority foster carers and adopters to extend their home, or to part fund new home purchases, where it is necessary to do so to meet the needs of looked after children.

1.2 The policy sets out the circumstances in which such funding will be considered.

2. Scope of Policy

2.1 The policy covers all requests for home extensions and adaptations from Rotherham Local Authority foster carers and adopters.

2.2 The policy also covers all such requests from foster carers and adopters registered with other local authorities, and independent or voluntary agencies where the foster carers or adopters are caring for or considering caring for Rotherham looked after children.

3. Definitions

3.1 Permanence – this refers to the plan for a child to remain with a carer for the remainder of their childhood and into adulthood.

3.2 Fostering Plus – this refers to the Local Authority's fee paid fostering scheme whereby specifically approved foster carers offer care to looked after children with the most complex and challenging needs.

3.3 Staying Put – Staying Put refers to circumstances where a looked after child in foster placement who turns 18 remains living with the same foster carer, no longer as a looked after child, but as an adult, as occurs in many birth families.

3.4 Statutory Looked after Children Review – this refers to the independent review of each looked after child's case. There is legal requirement for these reviews to be held regularly and for the reviews to challenge and endorse plans being made for looked after children.

3.5 Looked After Children – looked after children are all those children who are cared for by the local authority, either as a result of a Court Order authorising the Local Authority to care for a child or by voluntary agreement of the child's birth parents.

4. Introduction

4.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide sufficient accommodation for looked after children. There is also a requirement for the Local Authority to ensure that looked after children are placed in foster or adoptive homes with their siblings, unless there is a child welfare reason not to do so.

4.2 This policy, which allows for funding to be provided to enable foster carers and adopters to enlarge their homes, or in some circumstances to obtain an alternative larger home, is designed to increase the Local Authority's capacity to accommodate looked after children locally and in particular to provide for additional capacity to secure permanence for sibling groups with foster carers and adopters.

5. Legal Framework

5.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide sufficient accommodation for looked after children as set out in the Children Act 1989. Section 22G of the 1989 Act requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area. In those circumstances, section 22G requires local authorities, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for those children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area.

5.2 The power to provide funding for home extensions and new home purchases in this case is to be found in The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

6. Eligibility Criteria for Provision of Funding for Home Extension or Purchase

6.1 Consideration of the provision of funding for home extensions/adaptations and part funding of new home purchases for foster carers and adopters will be given in the following circumstances:

- Where siblings are placed in a foster placement and the best plan for them, as endorsed via a statutory looked after children review, is to remain placed together in that placement, and where such a permanence plan cannot be implemented without the provision of an extension or alternative home due to an inadequate number of bedrooms.
- Where the best plan for a child, as endorsed via a statutory looked after children review, is to be fostered permanently by the foster carer of a sibling of his or hers, but where this plan cannot be implemented without the provision of an extension or alternative home due to inadequate bedroom space
- Where an existing foster carer has opted to continue to offer a home to a previously fostered child under the Staying Put arrangements but in doing so

no longer has bedroom space to take a foster placement and the carer would be enabled by the provision of additional bedroom space to offer further foster placements to adolescents who might otherwise be placed in Fostering Plus placements or independent sector provision. That the foster carer's circumstances match these here should be evidenced in the most recent foster care review.

- Where the best plan for a child, as endorsed via a statutory looked after children review, is to be placed for adoption with a sibling of theirs but this plan cannot be implemented without the provision of an extension or alternative home due to inadequate bedroom space.
- Where a home extension or adaptation or alternative home is essential to provide a permanence placement for a looked after child with disabilities, and where this plan has been endorsed via the statutory looked after children review.

7. Process for Approval

7.1 All applications for funding via this scheme will require approval by the Service Manager/Head of Service for Looked after Children Provision, Human Resources, Finance and Legal Services. Applications are then required to be presented at the Director Leadership Team, (DLT) for final approval by the Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services. Representations to DLT must be submitted on the Local Authority's "Public/Private Reports Council/ or Other Formal Meeting" document. Once approval has been agreed, the 'Pathways to Care" application form, (SS.CC.747) must be completed and submitted to the CYPS Asset Manager via AssetManagementSupport@rotherham.gov.uk.

8. Legal Agreements

8.1 Any projects agreed will be subject to legally binding contracts between the foster carers/adopters and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council with a sliding scale of payback should the increased capacity not be delivered or in the event of placement breakdown or carers terminating their registration.

8.2 In the event that the foster carers/adopters, at their initiative, cease to offer the child placement/s for which the funding had been provided within a period of 5 years following the provision of funds the monies will be repayable to the Council at their discretion on the following basis:-

- 1st year-100% repayable
- 2nd Year- 80% repayable
- 3rd Year-60% repayable
- 4th Year-40% repayable
- 5th Year-20% repayable

8.3 Where the Council are providing such assistance a legal charge will be placed on any property which the Council has provided funding to acquire or, in the case of funding adaptations, any property which is owned by the foster carer or adopter. This charge will be removed after 5 years at the request of the foster carer or adopter.

8.4 All foster carers and adopters will be required to access independent legal advice before signing the legal agreement and before funds can be released. These legal documents will be made available by CYPS Asset Management Team.

9. Provision of Funding

9.1 In the case of home extensions or adaptations, where funding is agreed it will not be provided directly to the foster carer/adopter but will be used to pay contractors directly.

9.2 In the case of home extensions and adaptations, that any building works are compliant with current planning law and Building Regulations.

9.3 In the case of home extensions or adaptations, funding will be provided on the condition that the works are carried out only by Council approved building contractors following a competitive process.

9.4 In the case of home extensions and adaptations and new home purchases, funding will only be provided to cover the costs of the most cost effective way to achieve the required additional living space.